

Practical Demonstration of a Low Cost – Long Range – Packet Radio over 700 MHz Spectral Region

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Defence R&D Canada – Centre for Security Science

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Abstract

This report serves as the milestone nine as defined in the project: “Asymmetric Threat Mitigation in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway and Maritime Ports and Inshore Waters.” It documents a practical field experimentation on the construction of a simple packet radio that operates over long distances and uses existing Wi-Fi technology. The work innovates by using Wi-Fi constrained to 5 MHz bandwidth over 700 MHz licensed spectral allocation, organized in a multi-hop mode as opposed to point-to-point or point-multipoint fashion. This allows for a possible expansion towards a true mesh network for long-distance packet radio. The system built connects CRC, via cameras, with two other sites: one 22 km to the east, and the other 7 km to the west. The radio is energy efficient and transmits around 1.5 Mbps with powers below 400 mW while consuming less than 7 W to operate each node. In remote locations it could operate with a solar panel. CRC’s work is useful because it helps answer the question: what is the lowest price and simplest system one can possibly assemble for a certain minimum broadband performance? By modifying off-the-shelf Wi-Fi equipment this experiment was assembled for roughly \$600. While this low-cost surveillance solution is not a production model, but a research model, it well serves as a platform for further research on many related topics such as: bit-rate performance of multi-hop systems versus number of hops; system capacity issues in multi-hop and mesh radio configurations; RF interference effects on the effective bit rate performance; multi-hop with frequency re-use; studies on the effect of antenna mutual coupling per hop node and antenna polarization diversity applied in the wireless access nodes.

Résumé

Ce rapport correspond à l'étape numéro neuf du projet: "Asymmetric Threat Mitigation in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway and Maritime Ports and Inshore Waters". Il documente une expérience sur la construction d'une radio à paquets qui fonctionne sur de longues distances en utilisant la technologie Wi-Fi existante. Le travail innove en opérant avec une connexion Wi-Fi limitée à 5 MHz de bande passante dans la bande spectrale de 700 MHz (sous licence), organisée en mode multi-nœuds, par opposition à un système point à point ou point-multipoint. Cela permet une extension possible vers un réseau maillé pour radio à paquets à longue distance. Le système construit relie CRC, via des caméras, avec deux autres sites: un à 22 km à l'est de CRC et l'autre à 7 km à l'ouest de CRC. La radio est économe en énergie et peut transmettre à un débit de 1,5 Mbps avec une puissance de transmission inférieure à 400 mW tout en consommant moins de 7 W pour faire fonctionner chaque nœud; en régions éloignées, il pourrait donc fonctionner avec un panneau solaire. Les travaux du CRC sont utiles car ils permettent de répondre à la question: quel est le prix le plus bas et le système le plus simple qui peut être assemblé pour produire un système capable d'accomplir un certain débit de transmission? En modifiant de l'équipement Wi-Fi standard, ce système a été assemblé pour environ 600 \$. Bien que cette solution de surveillance à faible coût n'est pas un équipement de production, mais un prototype de recherche, il peut servir de plate-forme pour de nouvelles recherches sur de nombreux sujets connexes tels que: la performance du système en fonction du nombre de nœuds; les défis de capacité du système en fonction des configurations multi-nœuds et de radios maillés ; les effets de brouillage RF sur les performances de débit; la réutilisation des fréquences dans un système multi-nœuds; l'étude de l'effet de couplage mutuel des antennes et l'effet de la diversité de polarisation des antennes pour les nœuds d'accès sans fil.

Executive Summary

Practical Demonstration of a Low Cost – Long Range – Packet Radio over 700 MHz Spectral Region

The BTS-341 project general objectives were to evaluate security needs (gaps) and emerging technologies to enhance persistent surveillance and small vessel detection, identification and tracking in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway, and maritime inshore waters and ports. The scope of the CRC portion of the work was to propose an integrated wireless access solution for surveillance data traffic serving the St. Lawrence Seaway border regions. The work output was to demonstrate, in practical field experimentation, the basic hop network operating in 700 MHz band over long distances.

CRC has been aware of the existence of long range WiFi, point-to-point systems, that were tested in field experimentation over 20 to 30 km in several places around the world. The motivation for this work was to innovate under the following conditions:

- This work innovates by using long distance WiFi constrained to 5 MHz bandwidth over 700 MHz licensed spectral allocation. Normally long-range WiFi uses point-to-point configurations with 20 MHz signal bandwidth over unlicensed 2.4 GHz or 5.8 GHz carrier frequencies.
- The work uses long distance WiFi in a multi-hop mode as opposed to point-to-point or point-multipoint fashion. This allows the construction of a true mesh network for long distance packet radio.

This approach allows for a possible expansion towards a true mesh network for long-distance packet radio.

The low-cost surveillance solution developed in this work is a prototype that can serve as a platform for further research on many related topics such as: bit-rate performance of multi-hop systems versus number of hops; system capacity issues in multi-hop and mesh radio configurations; RF interference effects on the effective bit rate performance; multi-hop with frequency re-use; studies on the effect of antenna mutual coupling per hop node and antenna polarization diversity applied in the wireless access nodes.

The spectrum of 700 MHz used for the experiments in this project has been allocated to Public Safety and Security applications. Communications for Safety and Security are likely to be deployed in Canada under the so called 4th generation of cellphone technology (also known as LTE – Long Term Evolution). However, 700 MHz LTE systems are not commercial yet. The simple system deployed and demonstrated in this work gives some insights as to what kind of services and performances one can expect to receive from the much more complex and expensive LTE when it becomes available.

Practical Demonstration of a Low Cost – Long Range – Packet Radio over 700 MHz Spectral Region

Les objectifs généraux du projet BTS 341 consistent à évaluer les besoins en sécurité (lacunes) et les technologies émergentes pour améliorer la surveillance constante et la détection de petits navires, ainsi que l'identification et la poursuite de cibles dans la Voie maritime des Grands Lacs et du Saint Laurent, les ports maritimes et les eaux côtières. La partie des travaux réalisée par le Centre de recherches sur les communications (CRC) vise à proposer une solution d'accès sans fil intégrée pour la surveillance du trafic de données qui couvre les régions limitrophes de la Voie maritime du Saint Laurent. Ces travaux visent à démontrer, dans le cadre d'une expérience pratique sur le terrain, le fonctionnement sur de longues distances des réseaux à bords de base dans la bande de 700 MHz.

Le CRC connaît l'existence des systèmes point à point Wi Fi longue distance, qui ont été mis à l'essai au cours d'expériences sur le terrain sur des distances de 20 à 30 km à plusieurs endroits dans le monde. Les présents travaux visent à innover dans les conditions mentionnées ci-dessous.

- Les présents travaux innoveront en utilisant le Wi Fi longue distance limité à une largeur de bande de 5 MHz sur les fréquences autorisées attribuées dans la bande de 700 MHz. En temps normal, le Wi Fi longue distance utilise des configurations point à point avec une largeur de bande des signaux de 20 MHz sur des fréquences porteuses non autorisées de 2,4 GHz ou de 5,8 GHz.
- Pour les travaux, le Wi Fi longue distance est utilisé en mode à bords multiples plutôt qu'en mode point à point ou point à multipoint. Le mode utilisé permet la construction d'un véritable réseau maillé pour les radiocommunications par paquets à longue distance.

La présente approche permet l'expansion vers un véritable réseau maillé pour les radiocommunications par paquets à longue distance.

La solution de surveillance à faible coût mise au point dans le cadre des présents travaux est un prototype qui peut servir de plateforme à d'autres recherches sur de nombreux sujets connexes, comme : le rendement de débit binaire des systèmes à bords multiples en fonction du nombre de bords, les problèmes de capacité du système en configuration radio maillée et à bords multiples, les effets du brouillage RF sur le rendement de débit binaire efficace, les bords multiples avec réutilisation de fréquences, les études des effets du couplage mutuel des antennes par nœud et la diversité de la polarisation des antennes appliquée dans les nœuds d'accès sans fil.

La bande de 700 MHz utilisée pour réaliser les expériences du présent projet a été attribuée aux applications de sûreté et de sécurité publique. De plus, les systèmes de communications aux fins de sûreté et de sécurité seront sans doute déployés au Canada au moyen de la technologie cellulaire dite de quatrième génération (aussi appelée LTE ou évolution à long terme). Les systèmes LTE dans la bande de 700 MHz ne sont toutefois pas encore offerts sur le marché. Par ailleurs, le système simple déployé et démontré dans le cadre des présents travaux donne un aperçu du type de services et des performances attendues pour un système LTE beaucoup plus complexe et coûteux, lorsque ce dernier sera disponible.

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1 Introduction

This report refers to the completion of Milestone 9 as defined in the project: “Asymmetric Threat Mitigation in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway and Maritime Ports and Inshore Waters”. The project had CRC as the Federal Department Lead, with A.U.G. Signals Ltd, CFN Consultants, Blue Force Global and AKW Global Enterprises in charge of executing the main project (PSTP Project No. 02-341 BTS). The main project started on September 2010 and finished on June 2011 with Milestone 9 left to be finished in a later date (December 2011).

The BTS-341 project general objectives were to evaluate security needs (gaps) and emerging technologies to enhance persistent surveillance and small vessel detection, identification and tracking in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway, and maritime inshore waters and ports. Within Milestone 9, the scope of the CRC work was to propose an integrated wireless access solution for surveillance data traffic serving the St. Lawrence Seaway border regions. The work output was to demonstrate, in a practical field experimentation, the basic hop network operating in 700 MHz band over long distances.

The reason why this report is detached from the main report of the BTS-341 project is because Milestone 9 had an extended execution deadline particularly adjusted to accommodate the construction and testing of hardware, software and the integration of the system for the field demonstration. This work describes how this was achieved and show the results accomplished.

1.1 Contribution of Milestone 9

CRC has been aware of the existence of long range WiFi, point-to-point systems, that were tested in field experimentation over 20 to 30 km in several places around the world [1]. The motivation for this work has never been to repeat a proven concept, but rather to innovate under the following conditions:

- This work innovates by using long distance WiFi constrained to 5 MHz bandwidth over 700 MHz licensed spectral allocation. Normally long-range WiFi uses point-to-point configurations with 20 MHz signal bandwidth over unlicensed 2.4 GHz or 5.8 GHz carrier frequencies.
- The work uses long distance WiFi in a multi-hop mode as opposed to point-to-point or point-multipoint fashion. This allows the construction of a true mesh network for long distance packet radio.

Besides the innovative aspects, Milestone 9 provided the Canadian R&D community involved in this project with familiarization of 700 MHz bands and an understanding of the potential of cognitive radios that may operate over UHF frequencies within TV white spaces [2]. Although Milestone 9 does not deal directly with cognitive radios, it provides a platform for the development of hardware and software that can be extended into TV vacant channels (where cognitive radio operation has been proposed).

Finally, this work represents a low benchmark performance for long range WiFi systems. This is because this system has been constructed with low-cost, off-the-shelf, components and it is very simple to assemble and operate. The spectrum of 700 MHz used for the experiments in Milestone 9 has been allocated to Public Safety and Security applications. Communications for Safety and Security are likely to be deployed in Canada under the so called 4th generation of cellphone technology (also known as LTE – Long Term Evolution). However, 700 MHz LTE systems are not commercial yet. The simple system deployed and demonstrated in this work gives some insights as to what kind of services and performances

one can expect to receive from the much more complex and expensive LTE when it becomes available. CRC work is useful because it helps to answer the question: what is the lowest price and simplest system one can possibly assemble for a certain minimum broadband performance? This benchmark data will help personnel with test systems in advance of the Long-Term Evolution (LTE) procurements, thus educating Public Safety of the capabilities they can expect from suppliers when procuring high-end communications in the very near future.

2 System Design – Methodology

This work has been centred in the construction of an experimental radio network prototype which followed guidelines that are important for surveillance. The scenario was motivated in the data traffic for the surveillance of the St. Lawrence Seaway border region. Some of the key conditions were: must be a wireless access system able to expand into a full mesh network; must form a network with inexpensive wireless access nodes; must be energy efficient and consume low power; must be easy to install and maintain and must be a long-range packet radio system. These conditions are explained in more detail as follows:

- Monitoring over long distances: consider the example of surveillance from Montreal to Kingston with almost 300 km of shoreline. Data centres indicated as (A) and (B) in Figure 1 would be responsible for aggregating the sensor data collected alongside the Seaway. Thus, sensor data gathered along the Seaway might travel distances as far as 150 km in order to reach the nearest collection facility centre. This calls for a radio system designed for long-range backhaul capability.

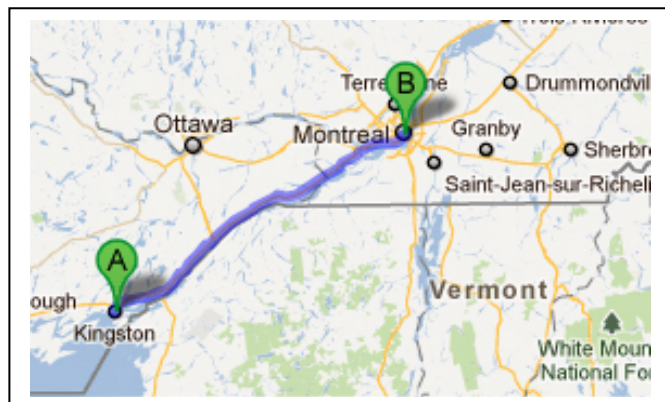


Figure 1: Long distance backhaul.

- Efficiency and low cost: a long-range system needs to have a low maintenance characteristic in order to reduce its operational costs. Energy efficiency is also required. Our demonstration radio prototype consumes little energy (i.e. produces less heat, no special cooling needed). One desired feature is the possibility of using solar energy as the source of electrical power for the radios. These principles resulted in a prototype composed of two small electronic boards of low cost, placed inside an aluminum case with cables and antennas.
- Scalable to a full mesh network: the mesh network is fault tolerant in the sense that if the current communication data path breaks then there is the possibility for the data to switch and travel through a different route. Moreover, each node is an access point for the remote sensors of the network (Figure 2). Using this guidance our demonstration prototype started with three nodes, and each node acts as a relay as well as an access point to the network.

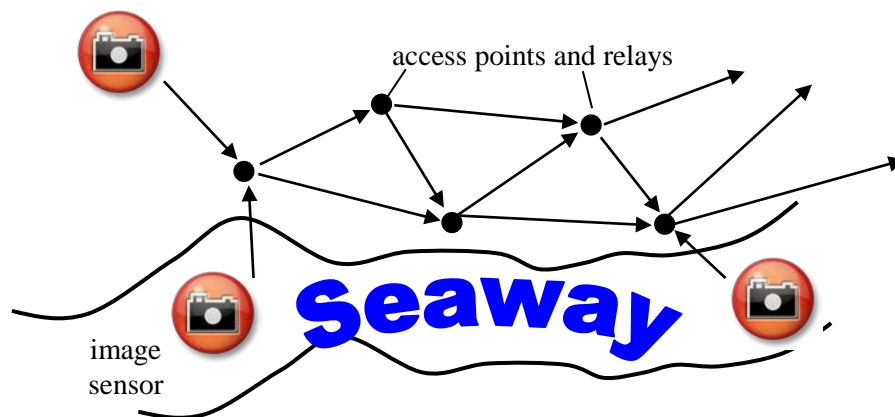


Figure 2: Each node is a network access point.

- Easy installation and operation: the prototype weighs less than 2 kg with the antenna. It takes a single cable of the type RJ-45 (Ethernet cable) that connects the radio with a laptop (for system configuration) and a car battery that supplies electricity to the system. The cable also provides network access to computers. Finally, the WiFi connection links a sensor to the network. Note the sensors are equipped with WiFi transceivers. A commercial example of such WiFi enabled sensor is shown in Figure 3. The basic network access node is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 3: Commercial infrared and image sensors with WiFi connectivity.

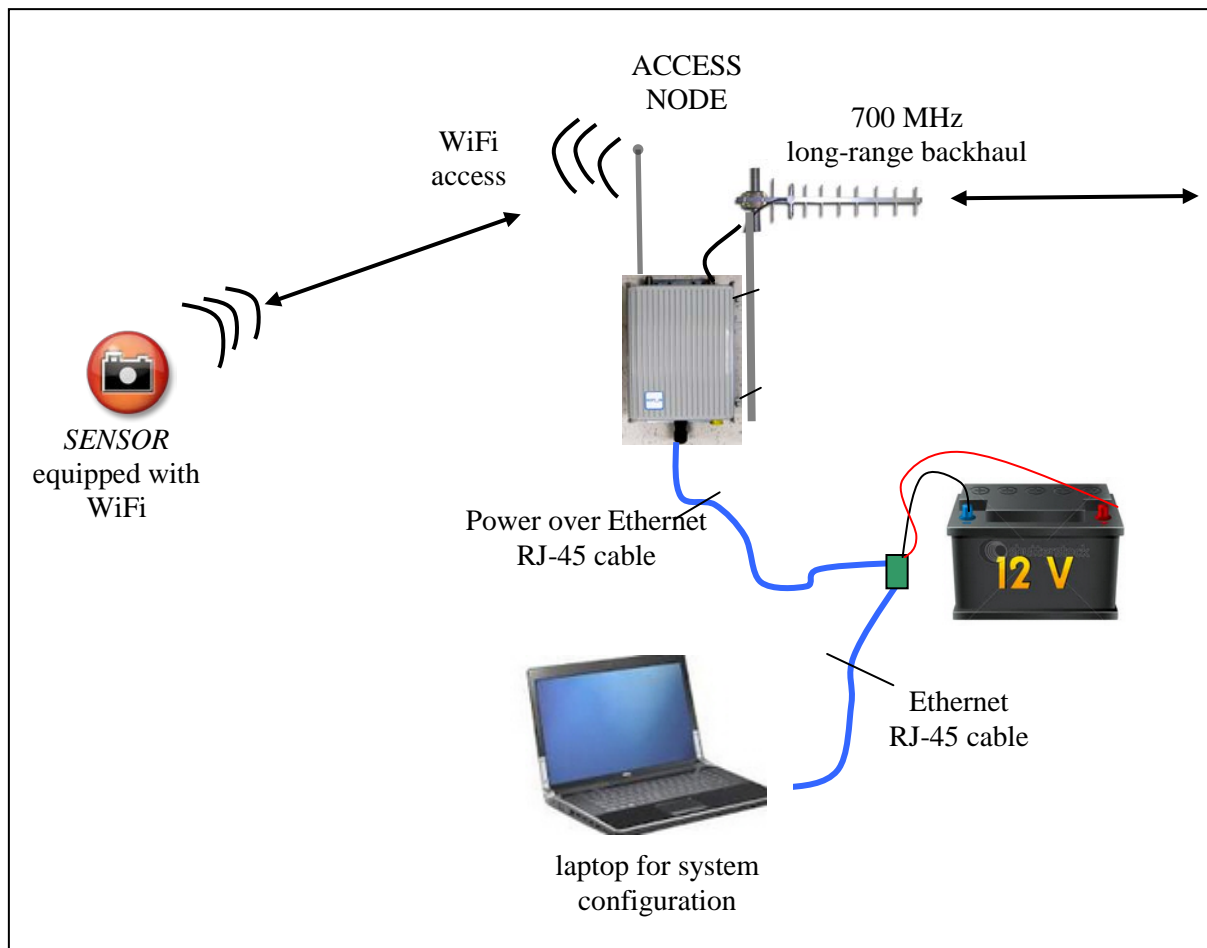


Figure 4: Access node has few components and is easy to install.

A battery of 12V feeds the access node by the same cable which allows for a laptop connection and system configuration. Inside the access node box there is one 2.4 GHz WiFi router that gives connectivity to the wireless sensors. This feature forms a hot-spot area with about 100 metres in radius around the access node. Finally, the 700 MHz antenna forms the backhaul that links this node with other nodes in the system (i.e. hop network or mesh configuration).

3 Channelization Plan

The frequency plan used for the demonstration is:

- 760.5 – 765.5 MHz, centre frequency at 763 MHz (part of old TV channel 62 & 63)
- 771.0-776.0 MHz, centre frequency at 773.5 MHz (part of old TV channel 64).

In the US, the spectrum allocation for public safety and security uses a different plan as shown in Figure 5. The USA Federal Communications Commission – FCC [3] designated the frequencies: 763-768 MHz and 793-798 MHz for broadband communications. FCC also designated the frequencies of: 769-775 MHz and 799-805 MHz for narrowband applications. Furthermore, the narrowband segments are partitioned into 960 channels each with 6.25 kHz of allocated bandwidth. How this impacts the task of monitoring is the subject of analysis of the next sub-item.

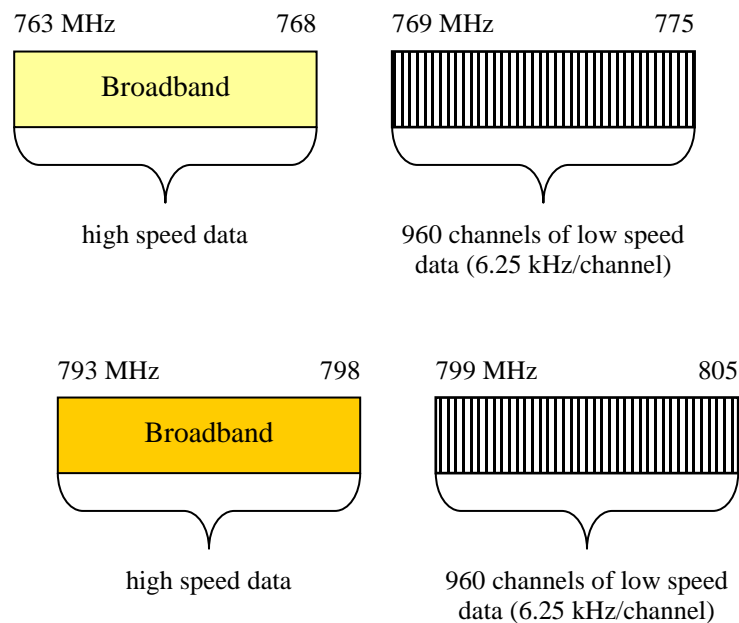


Figure 5: Channelization plan in the US for safety and security applications..

3.1 Narrowband and Broadband Interplay

The construction of a long-range wireless solution for sensor connectivity must fit within a channelization structure, particularly if Canada opts for a frequency plan as in Figure 5. A good solution explores both broadband and narrowband resources in order to render sensor data to a central location.

Each sensor in the network may operate in ON/OFF fashion, that is, perform only during an interval over a certain period. After the ON/OFF period is computed then an upper limit for the aggregate effective bandwidth of the access node can be calculated. This is done in a preliminary form by a simple formula: $N \times b \times t / T$, where t/T is the time ON/OFF for the sensor, b is the sensor bit rate and N is the number of sensors per node.

A numerical example clarifies the scenario: a commercial off-the-self camera is capable of recording with a resolution of 640 per 480 pixels per frame. It may take 15 to 30 frames per second and use an image compression technique such as MPEG4. This requires roughly 64 kbps of data bandwidth (high-end cameras may require up to 300 kbps). In 10 seconds the camera will acquire 150 frames and will produce 640 kbits of data [4]. Data recording and transmission is set to 10 seconds ON and 50 seconds OFF.

Therefore, in this example, the effective bit rate would be $(10/60) \times (64k) = 10.67$ kbps. This will require two channels of the narrowband portion of the spectrum allocated to Safety and Security in order to forward data from that sensor.

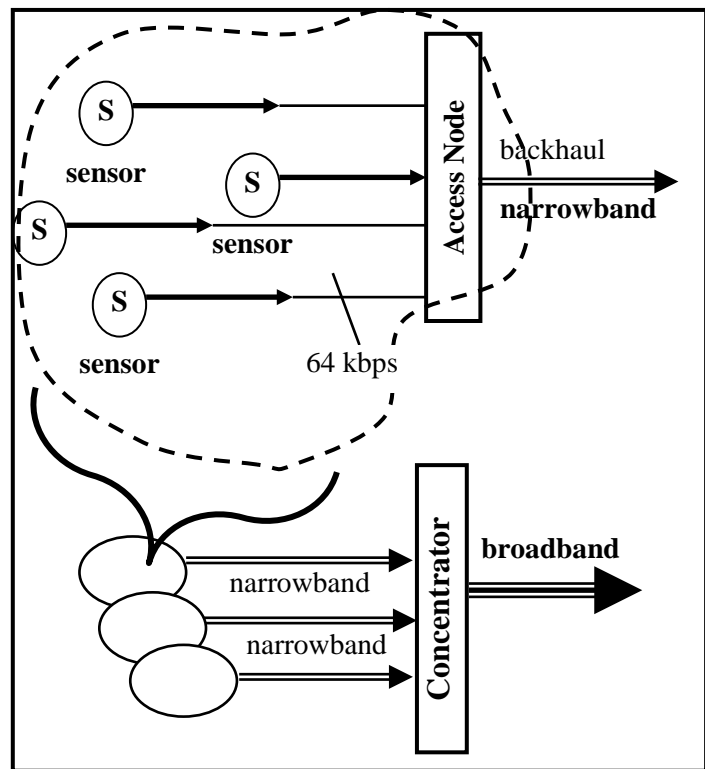


Figure 6 – Data aggregation

The analysis may be expanded to include an overhead due to the wireless transmission protocols. A typical overhead is around 30% to be added to the computation. Another factor to consider is the air-interface interval between data packets. In a packet radio there may be an average of 10% of idle interval between consecutive transmit packets (for example, in 100 ms period there may be 90 ms actually occupied by an RF carrier in the air interface). This idle interval between packets is normally random and has an average that is a function of the firmware. Moreover, sensor data may be carried out in one-way fashion (i.e. traffic from sensor to central controller without feedback as in UDP packets) which increases the system capacity. In fact sensor data is commonly a one-way communication.

Finally, several narrowband channels may be multiplexed by a concentrator and the final aggregate is forwarded by a broadband channel.

4 Assembling the Experiment

4.1 Planning the sites and Computing the Link Budget

The demonstration of the long range 700MHz – WiFi @ 5MHz bandwidth required a detailed study of the electromagnetic propagation characteristics of the terrain around Ottawa, ON. With the propagation study in hand we were able to plan the location of the sites for the access nodes of the network.

The method selected for the coverage prediction was via computer simulation. CRC-COVLAB® V 3.0 Coverage Prediction and Analysis Software [5] was the tool used for the computations. COVLAB is a professional software package that has been employed by commercial radio and TV broadcast stations across the world.

The sites that were finally chosen were 22 km to the east of CRC, and the other 7 km to the north as shown in Figure 7 – Figure 9. Moreover, the computer simulation by COVLAB provided results for receive powers under a service availability of 95% (see Figure 10).

The final system proved to be energy efficient. The radios transmit around 1.5 Mbps with powers below 400 mW while consuming less than 7 W to operate each node. In remote locations the node could operate with a solar panel. Other parameters used in the computation of the link budget include:

- Tx plus Rx cable/connector losses: 2 dB
- Tx and Rx antenna: ZDA Communications, model ZDADJ750-14G, measured antenna gain at anechoic chamber (CRC): 12 dBi; crosspol: -20dB; beamwidth ~42° (azimuth plain). Tx and Rx antenna height: St. Laurent site (50 m); CRC site (18 m).
- Azimuth orientation St. Laurent to CRC: 239°.
- Operation: carrier frequency of 773.000 MHz, signal bandwidth of 5 MHz, digital signal.
- Transmit power: 26 dBm over 5 MHz.
- Receiver noise figure: 6 dB.
- Terrain: land cover data base by GeoBase (Canadian Council on Geomatics) – National Capital Region and elevation by U.S. Geological Survey data base.

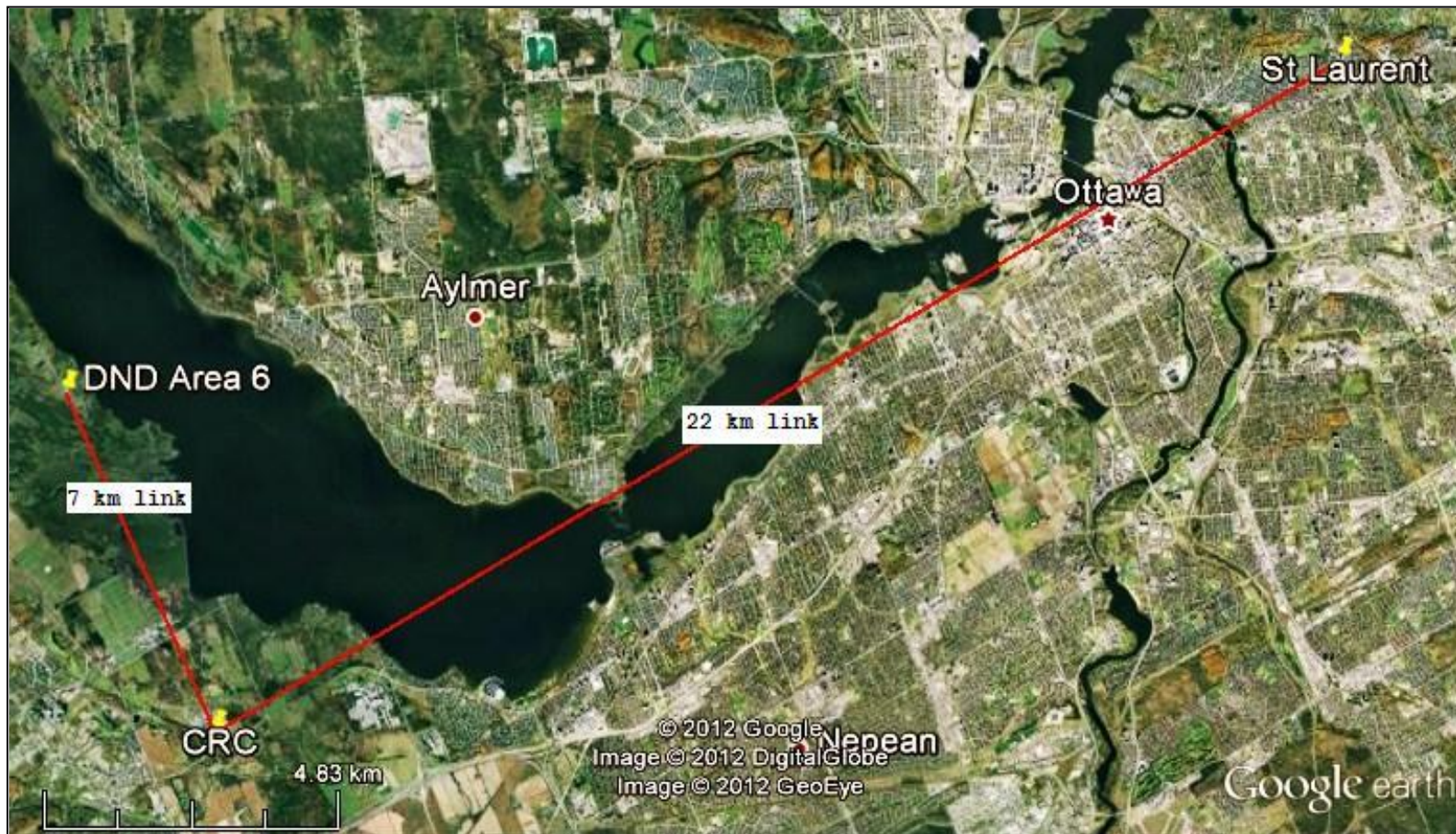


Figure 7: CRC to St. Laurent link is ~22 km long and CRC to DND Area 6 is ~7 km.

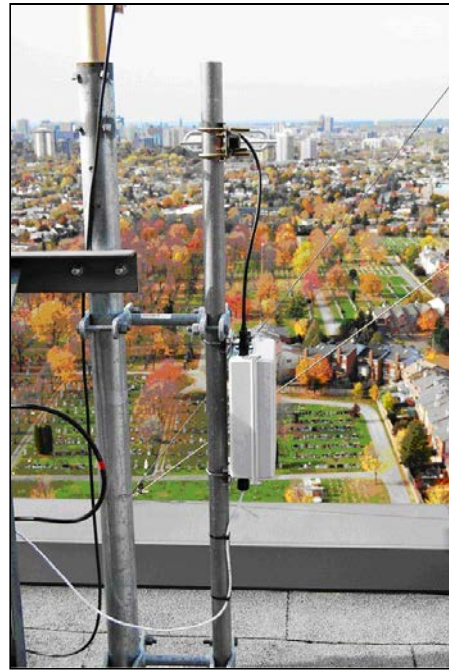


Figure 8 -View from the St. Laurent site with access node installed ~50m high.

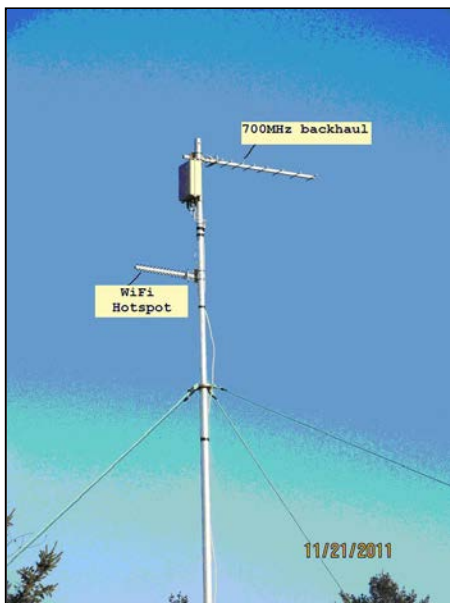


Figure 9 -View from DND area-6 with the access node installed in a mast ~7 metres high.

Coverage Prediction {773 MHz; Power: 26dBm; 12dBi Tx/Rx antenna;
2.0 dB connector/cable losses; St. Laurent antenna 50m high; CRC
receive antenna 18m high}

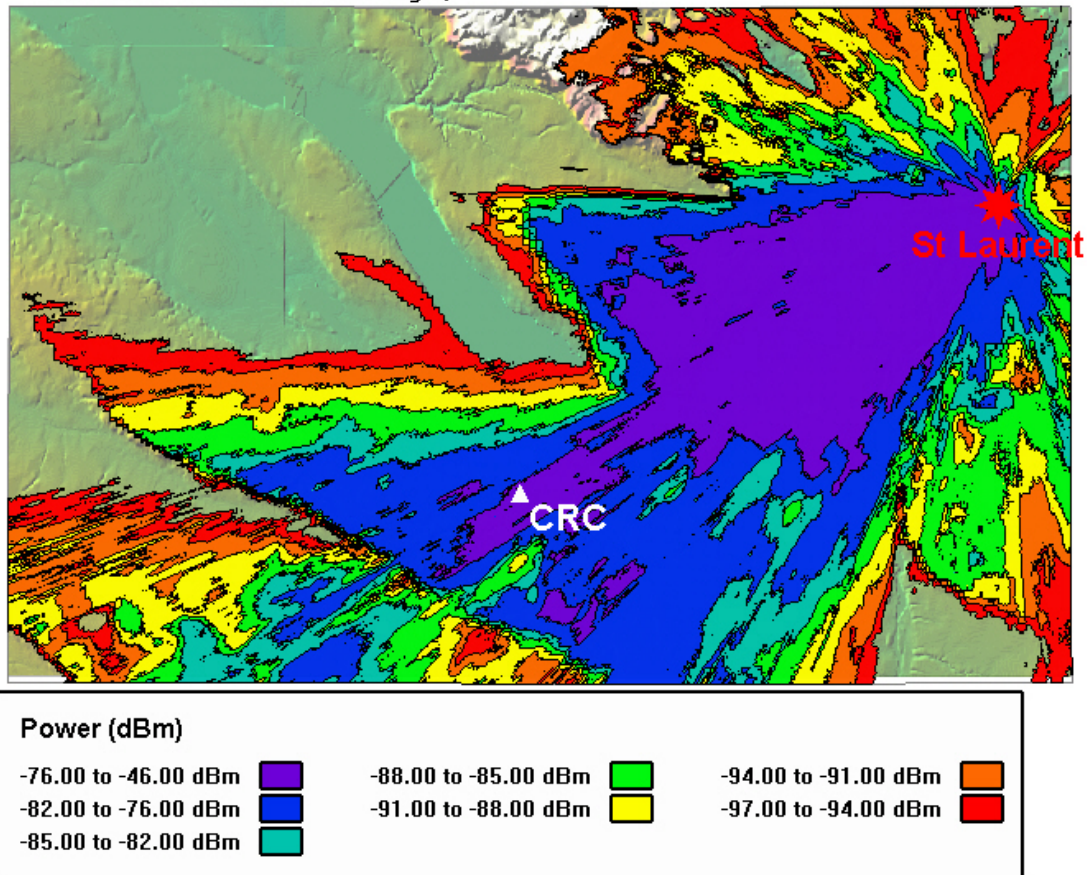


Figure 10 –COVLAB shows the coverage from St. Laurent site to CRC. Signal level at CRC is approximately -76 dBm for transmit power of +26 dBm (Copyright © by Industry Canada 1991–2007).

4.2 Network Access Node Firmware

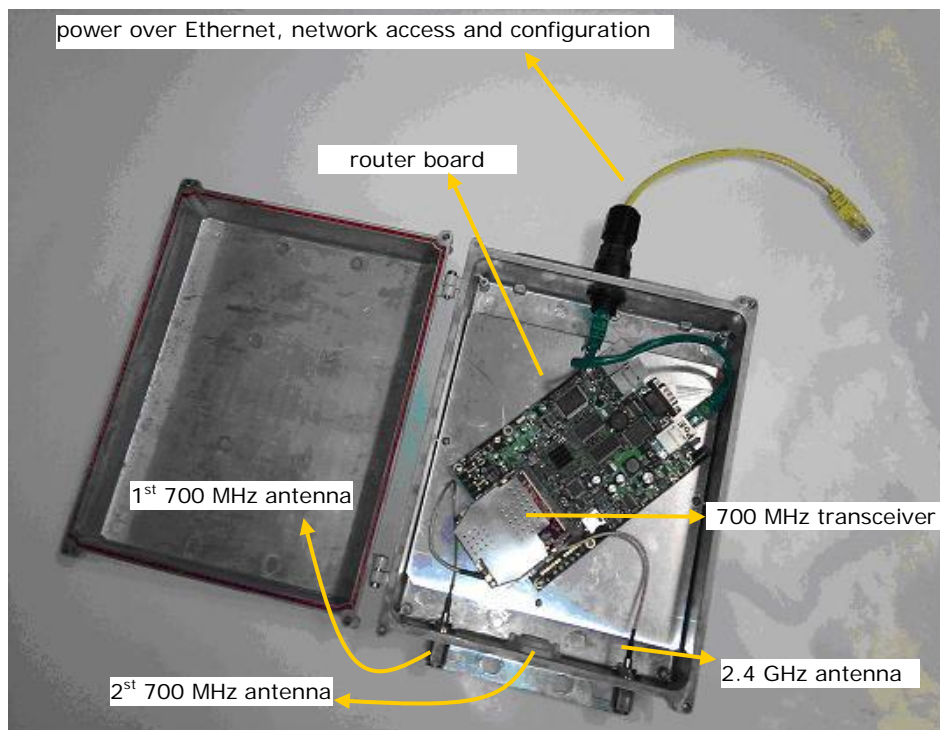
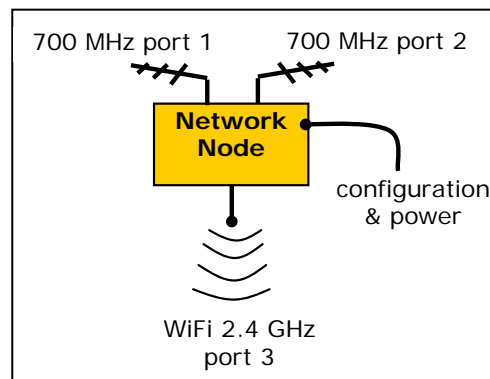


Figure 11 –Network access node with 700 MHz port and 2.4 GHz WiFi hotspot.

The network access node is composed of:

- Weather resistant aluminium box equipped with gasket and sealed outdoor connectors. There are three connectors (see Figure 11): one power over Ethernet cable that is used also for system configuration and as a network access port.
- RF cards: the router board can be fitted with up to 3 RF cards. Figure 11 shows an upper slot containing one 700 MHz transceiver. Below that there is a middle slot with one RF card supporting the access for 2.4 GHz WiFi devices. The lower slot supports a second 700 MHz transceiver.
- Router board: is the motherboard for the RF slots. Its function is to route TCP/IP packets to and from anyone of the four ports. Note the in/out ports 1, 2 and 3 are RF ports while port 4 is an Ethernet port with standard cable RJ45.



– The Router Board



Figure 12 – Detail of the MikroTik router board (Copyright © Mikrotik Ltd, 2000–2006).

Details of the router board are shown in Figure 12 with three RF slots. The board manufacturer is MikroTik, model RB433AH Router. It was chosen due to its characteristics which comprise:

- MIPS-based AR7100 processor with 300 MHz clock.
- Has 128 MB of internal RAM and 64 MB of flash memory.
- 3 Ethernet ports of which 1 port is PoE (power over Ethernet) and Auto MDI/X
- 1 serial port (configuration and debugging)
- 3 miniPCI slots (where RF cards are connected).

– The 700 MHz Radio

Transceiver Card

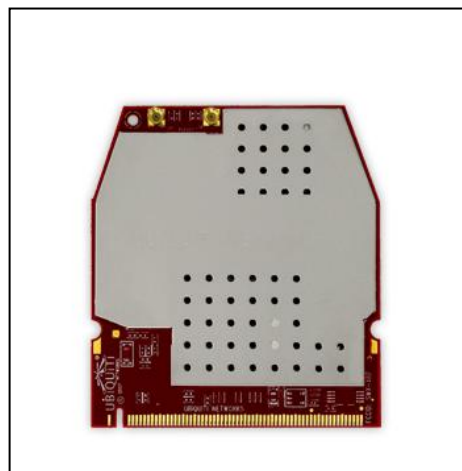


Figure 13 – The XR7–700 MHz WiFi radio (Copyright © 2011 by Ubiquiti Networks, Inc.).

A picture of the 700 MHz WiFi radio is in Figure 13. The transceiver manufacturer is Ubiquiti, model XR7. It has some key features useful this experiment:

- Works with 4 RF channels located between 763 – 778 MHz.
- Protocol derived from 802.11 b/g MAC and translated to 700 MHz band.
- The 700 MHz air interface transmits with a signal bandwidth that is 5 MHz wide as opposed to 20 MHz of traditional WiFi. Thus, it compresses the original WiFi spectrum.
- Uses miniPCI interface compatible with the router board from Mikrotik.

Our XR7 radio cards were tested and presented a maximum transmit packet power of +26 dBm for signals with 5 MHz bandwidth at 763 MHz.

– The 700 MHz Antenna

The 700 MHz antenna, from ZDA Communications, model ZDADJ750-14YG, had its radiation pattern measured in the CRC anechoic chamber where it showed a maximum gain of 12 dBi, ~42° beam width, and cross-polarization rejection of ~20dB.

The manufacturer specified the antenna operation within the range 746–806 MHz.

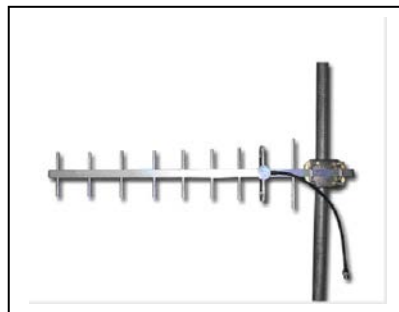


Figure 14 – 700 MHz antenna (Copyright © 2005-2010 by ZDA Communications US LLC.).

List of Software Modules

All software used were Open Source. The list of software ported into the nodes includes:

- Open WRT Linux.

- Modified MadWiFi Drivers.
- IPERF for throughput tests.

5 Performance

Figure 15 shows the network access nodes that were used for the practical demonstration during autumn 2011 in Ottawa.

A video camera was installed at St. Laurent site, marked as “site #3” in

Figure 15. The camera captured live video from the St. Laurent area and streamed the video through an Ethernet port (yellow cable, port 4, in Figure 11). The video data was routed by the Mikrotik board to the 700 MHz XR7 card. The signal was then amplified to +26 dBm and transmitted with a carrier of 773 MHz towards CRC, shown as site #1 in

Figure 15.

Site #1 is a network node with two 700 MHz antennas. One antenna points to site #3 and the other to site #2. The node relayed video data from site #3 (St. Laurent) to site #2 (DND Area 6). This relay was of the type “store and forward” so that there was an excess latency in the process of decoding the video packets from St. Laurent and encoding it again before forwarding it to Area-6. This store-and-forward method was the simplest to implement and presented one of the lowest performances amongst other types of relay methods. The result represented a low benchmark performance as far as latency in relay is concerned. The node #1 also worked as an access point (via port 4 of the Mikrotik router) which gave access to the network for a laptop located in a CRC laboratory.

Figure 15 – Experiment with 3 access nodes including WiFi hotspot and video camera.



Site #2 (Area-6) had two antennas: an upper antenna for the 700 MHz channel and another, at lower height, for the WiFi 2.4 GHz hotspot access point. The 700 MHz antenna pointed to CRC site #1 while the 2.4 GHz antenna pointed to a trail road in the fields around area-6 test site at a DND facility. At site #2 one laptop gained access to the network via port 3 (see Figure 11) using 2.4 GHz wireless link. From there, the Mikrotik board routed the signal to the 700 MHz port. Conversely, video data from St. Laurent was relayed by node #1 (CRC) and node #2 where it was delivered to the laptop connected by the WiFi hotspot at Area-6.

Bit-rate performance, obtained via IPERF, was as follows:

Table 1: Data rate performance (average bit rate)

to from	Site #1	Site #2	Site #3
Site #1		1.6 Mbps	1.3 Mbps
Site #2	1.6 Mbps		639 kbps
Site #3	1.4 Mbps	631 kbps	

6 Transition and Exploitation

As a demonstration project this experiment has no commercial value. It uses OpenSource software that is free and can be downloaded from the Internet (i.e. Open WRT Linux, IPERF, etc.). Its low cost (around \$600 for all three nodes assembled) allows other departments to assemble similar networks and test theoretical or simulation results with practical field verification for their models. CRC/Industry Canada does not claim any intellectual property in this Open system. It functions as a low benchmark performance for VHF packet radios.

7 Discussion of the Experiment and Perspectives Ahead

One noticeable result of this experiment was the maximum bit rate of 1.6 Mbps attained in the hop between Site #1 and Site #2 (7 km apart). While reasonably high, this performance number is somewhat lower than the theoretical bounds [6]. One explanation for this lower performance is the slow speed of the Mikrotik router that serves the transmit buffer of TCP/IP packets. The processor is slow in serving the transmit buffer while packets fill in quickly. While the buffer is full it slows down in the TCP/IP packet flow which decreases the bit rate performance. This problem appears not to be associated with the air interface (RF 700 MHz channel) and a solution would come by increasing the router board handling capabilities.

The performance amongst Site #1, #2 and #3 appears to be symmetrical for downlink and uplink. The average bit rate from Site #1→ #3 and from Site #3→ #1 are 1.3 and 1.4 Mbps respectively and this proximity suggests a symmetric link (in a statistical sense). Unfortunately, no records were taken that allows us to compute standard deviation or other statistics. Statistical analysis for this link may be performed in subsequent research.

Another result of interest was the decrease in bit rate by approximately one half from 1.4 Mbps (Site #3→ 1) to 631 kbps (Site #3→ 2) when the dataflow passed through the CRC relay node (double hop). A future experiment could test if the bit rate decreases by half whenever the flow passes by any other relay node. In other words, future work needs to verify if speed performance decreases by one third in triple-hop, by one fourth in quadruple-hop, etc. A theoretical reason may exist to explain this observation but was not researched in this project. Analysis of the latencies for packets from Site #3→ 1 and Site #1→ 2 and Site #3→ 2 would be a good addition in the road map of extra tests that can be exercised using this network in future.

This experimental setup allowed for the study of capacity issues. For instance, one could test the decrease in system capacity against interference and noise.

This experiment also allowed for another test of special importance which was the possibility of deploying the system with frequency re-use. That is, one could employ the frequency channel 773 MHz to transmit signals from Site #3→ 1 and then re-use that same channel in the relay from Site #1→ 2. How RF interference would affect the system performance if CRC relay node had used the same frequency channel to receive video from Site #3 and relay it to Site #2 is a point to be investigated.

Studies of capacity as function of the number of devices that compete for access per node was also possible in our experimental network (note configuration presented had only two users which were the video camera placed at Site #3 and a laptop at Site #2). This could open another research topic: “what would be the bit rate performance as a function of the number of devices, per node, trying to get access to the network?”.

Many other case studies appeared while we developed this radio platform, including the effects of polarization diversity versus system performance. Note that the present system used the same horizontal polarization in both antennas in all nodes. Also observe that both 700 MHz antennas at Site #1 were placed orthogonal to each other. What would be the effect of antenna mutual coupling and RF interference if the antennas were placed in different orientation with respect to one another?

Evidently, the list of research topics is large involving the matter of VHF long-range packet radios. The experimental setup presented in this document also aimed to help those engaged in theoretical and simulation studies that need field validation or practical model verification. Our network proved to have a simple setup, had low cost, and components were readily available off-the-self.

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MILESTONE #9 Experiment (this document) of PSTP 02-341 BTS

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List of symbols/abbreviations/acronyms/initialisms

CRC	Communications Research Centre
DND	Department of National Defence
DRDC	Defence R&D Canada
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
LTE	Long Term Evolution
MAC	Media Access Control
MDI/X	Media Dependent Interface
MPIS	Microprocessor without Interlocked Pipeline Stage
PSTP	Public Security Technical Program
RF	Radio Frequency
TCP/IP	Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol
UDP	User Datagram Protocol
VHF	Very High Frequency

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Abstract

This report serves as the milestone nine as defined in the project: “Asymmetric Threat Mitigation in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway and Maritime Ports and Inshore Waters.” It documents practical field experimentation on the construction of a simple packet radio that operates over long distances and uses existing Wi-Fi technology. The work innovates by using Wi-Fi constrained to 5 MHz bandwidth over 700 MHz licensed spectral allocation, organized in a multi-hop mode as opposed to point-to-point or point-multipoint fashion. This allows for a possible expansion towards a true mesh network for long-distance packet radio. The system built connects CRC, via cameras, with two other sites: one 22 km to the east, and the other 7 km to the west. The radio is energy efficient and transmits around 1.5 Mbps with powers below 400 mW while consuming less than 7 W to operate each node. In remote locations it could operate with a solar panel. CRC’s work is useful because it helps answer the question: what is the lowest price and simplest system one can possibly assemble for a certain minimum broadband performance? By modifying off-the-shelf Wi-Fi equipment this experiment was assembled for roughly \$600. While this low-cost surveillance solution is not a production model, but a research model, it well serves as a platform for further research on many related topics such as: bit-rate performance of multi-hop systems versus number of hops; system capacity issues in multi-hop and mesh radio configurations; RF interference effects on the effective bit rate performance; multi-hop with frequency re-use; studies on the effect of antenna mutual coupling per hop node and antenna polarization diversity applied in the wireless access nodes.

Résumé

Ce rapport correspond à l'étape numéro neuf du projet: “Asymmetric Threat Mitigation in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway and Maritime Ports and Inshore Waters”. Il documente une expérience sur la construction d'une radio à paquets qui fonctionne sur de longues distances en utilisant la technologie Wi-Fi existante. Le travail innove en opérant avec une connexion Wi-Fi limitée à 5 MHz de bande passante dans la bande spectrale de 700 MHz (sous licence), organisée en mode multi-noeuds, par opposition à un système point à point ou point-multipoint. Cela permet une extension possible vers un réseau maillé pour radio à paquets à longue distance. Le système construit relie CRC, via des caméras, avec deux autres sites: un à 22 km à l'est de CRC et l'autre à 7 km à l'ouest de CRC. La radio est économe en énergie et peut transmettre à un débit de 1,5 Mbps avec une puissance de transmission inférieure à 400 mW tout en consommant moins de 7 W pour faire fonctionner chaque nœud; en régions éloignées, il pourrait donc fonctionner avec un panneau solaire. Les travaux du CRC sont utiles car ils permettent de répondre à la question: quel est le prix le plus bas et le système le plus simple qui peut être assemblé pour produire un système capable d'accomplir un certain débit de transmission? En modifiant de l'équipement Wi-Fi standard, ce système a été assemblé pour environ 600 \$. Bien que cette solution de surveillance à faible coût n'est pas un équipement de production, mais un prototype de recherche, il peut servir de plate-forme pour de nouvelles recherches sur de nombreux sujets connexes tels que: la performance du système en fonction du nombre de nœuds; les défis de capacité du système en fonction des configurations multi-noeuds et de radios maillés ; les effets de brouillage RF sur les performances de débit; la réutilisation des fréquences dans un système multi-noeuds; l'étude de l'effet de couplage mutuel des antennes et l'effet de la diversité de polarisation des antennes pour les nœuds d'accès sans fil.

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Packet radio; Wi-Fi technology; 700 MHz